

LAMB and MUTTON

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UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

for the Table

by Sleeter Bull

Circular 645

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS • COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
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This circular is last in a series of publications on meats. BEEF FOR THE TABLE (Circular 585), PORK FOR THE TABLE (Circular 622), and VEAL FOR THE TABLE (Circular 629) have already appeared and will be sent free on request to residents of Illinois.

Some of the basic material in Circular 585, such as muscle structure and principles of cookery, is not repeated in this circular.

Cover picture courtesy National Live Stock and Meat Board.

LAMB AND MUTTON FOR THE TABLE

By SLEETER BULL, Professor of Meats

MOST of the sheep meat eaten in this country is lamb. It is especially popular as a party meat, rather than as a steady, day-in, day-out part of the diet like beef and pork. Together, the amount of lamb and mutton eaten in this country is less than one tenth as great as the amount of either beef or pork that is eaten. Lamb enthusiasts, however, form a rather constant group, so that the consumption of lamb does not vary from year to year like that of beef and pork.

The lamb trade is, for the most part, a quality trade. Most of the people who eat lamb are both willing and able to pay the price for it. This doesn't mean, however, that all lamb is priced beyond the reach of those who have to operate on a budget. While popular cuts of the better grades are fairly expensive, the lower grades and less popular cuts are much more reasonable. Another point to remember is that the lower grades of lamb and mutton are not used so much for ground meat, sausage, bologna, frankfurters, and cured meat as are beef and pork. For these reasons, the meat buyer who is looking for a bargain is likely to find it in some lamb cuts, and also in most mutton cuts.

This circular deals mostly with lamb, since it is so much more popular than mutton. Much of what can be said about lamb cuts, however, applies to mutton as well.

Lamb and mutton carcasses

Most lamb carcasses are from animals less than 12 months old, altho some lambs may be as old as 14 months when slaughtered. Lamb carcasses usually weigh 35 to 55 pounds. A "break joint" instead of a "round joint" on the foreleg of a carcass and on a leg of lamb (*Fig. 1*) identifies the meat as lamb. Spring lambs, also known as "milk lambs," are young, suckling lambs 3 to 5 months old. Many of them are shipped from California and Kentucky. They are usually sold just before Easter as "Easter lambs."



The "break joint" on the right indicates a lamb carcass; the "round joint" on the left a mutton carcass. (Fig. 1)

Mutton carcasses are from sheep which are past the lamb stage. Up to about 20 months of age they are "yearlings." There are very few yearling carcasses on the market. Carcasses from sheep more than 20 months old are known as "mature mutton." Most mature mutton is from old, worn-out breeding stock.

Mutton carcasses are subdivided into wethers (males castrated when young), ewes (females, pronounced "yews"), and bucks (males). No sex distinction is made with lamb carcasses, altho most of them are wether and ewe lambs.

Four points are used in grading lamb and mutton

Grades of lamb and mutton depend primarily on age, conformation, finish, and quality. Much of what can be said about grading beef carcasses¹ is also true of lamb and mutton.

Age. As stated above, lamb is from animals less than a year old. Other factors being equal, the tenderest meat comes from young animals. Hence lambs may qualify for the best grades provided they rate well in other respects. Mutton carcasses seldom grade as high as Good because they are usually from old animals in thin condition.

¹ Illinois Circular 585, "Beef for the Table."

Conformation. Like beef carcasses, lamb and mutton carcasses have ideal conformation if they have good width in proportion to length, short shanks and neck, and full thick legs, loins, ribs, and chucks. Cuts from carcasses of good conformation have a high amount of meat in proportion to bone, while cuts from the lower grades have less meat and more bone. Proper conformation is important to the retailer because it means a high percentage of the high-priced cuts.

Mutton and lamb carcasses of good conformation come from well-fed sheep which have been selected for many generations for the production of meat. Carcasses with poor conformation come from sheep that have been selected for wool production and from sheep that have had little or no artificial selection.

Finish. The amount and distribution of fat thru the carcass is known as the finish. The finish is of great importance in insuring flavor and tenderness. While a consumer interested mainly in economy prefers lean meat, because of the smaller amount of waste, a person interested mainly in flavor and tenderness, or palatability, buys fat meat.

For perfect finish, a carcass or a cut should have a smooth even covering of fat $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick over the outside (external fat), and an abundance of fat in the fine connective tissue which binds the muscle cells together (marbling).

Before an animal puts on external fat and marbling, it first stores up fat around some of the internal organs—kidneys, stomach, and intestines. Most of this internal fat is discarded when the animal is dressed and so is of little importance to the consumer.

Next, fat is deposited around the muscles. This *external fat* is very important to the housewife who wants tender, tasty meat. The covering of fat keeps the meat from drying out too much during cooking, helps to retain meat juices, and adds to the flavor of the lean just as butter adds to the flavor of bread.

The last fat to be deposited is the *marbling* (see above). To the connoisseur, this is the most important fat, for marbling adds greatly to the tenderness and flavor of a cut. Since it takes a great deal of feed to produce proper marbling, well-marbled meat is relatively expensive.¹

¹ A more complete discussion of why fat adds to the palatability of meat may be found in Illinois Circular 585, "Beef for the Table."

In addition to old age, poor finish is against many mutton carcasses going into the higher grades. Since prices for mutton are low, it is seldom profitable to feed market sheep to a good degree of finish.

Quality. As the term is used in meat grading, *quality* refers to texture or grain, firmness and color of the lean and fat, and the character of the bones.

The lean of high-grade lamb and mutton has a fine texture. When it is rubbed lightly with the finger tips, it has a velvety feel. It should be firm to the touch, and not soft, watery, or gummy.

In lambs the lean should be a light pink. The lean of mutton ranges from a dark pink or light red in yearlings to a dark red in mature mutton. The fat of high-grade lamb and mutton is very firm and white or creamy white.

The bones of lambs are porous, dark red, and comparatively soft, and they show break joints on the forelegs and the shank ends of the legs of lamb. "Buttons" of white cartilage or gristle round off the tips of the chine bones of the ribs and chucks. The bones of mature mutton are flinty and gray to white, with little or no cartilage on the chine bones.

Some helps for the consumer in selecting lamb and mutton

To judge the age, conformation, finish, and quality of meat is a task for the experts. Most consumer-buyers do not have the experience necessary to judge a carcass or a cut, but fortunately they do not have to rely on their own judgment entirely. Government grading gives them the unbiased opinion of the experts, and packer brands are also a help in selecting meat. A further protection to the consumer is Government inspection, which insures the wholesomeness of all meat that has been shipped from another state.

Government Grades and Inspection

When a carcass has been Government-graded, the grade mark is stamped along the back with harmless indelible ink, so that the name of the assigned grade appears on every major retail cut (*Fig. 2*). Altho Government grading is not obligatory, most com-

munities have markets which handle Government-graded meats.

The Government grades of lamb and mutton are U. S. Prime, U. S. Choice, U. S. Good, U. S. Commercial, U. S. Utility, and U. S. Cull.

U. S. Prime carcasses are the "show" of the trade. They are excellent in conformation and quality. Also, they must have a high degree of finish and marbling, for they go to consumers who want rich tender chops and roasts, regardless of the amount of waste fat. Only a few lambs and a very few yearlings are assigned to this grade. It includes no mature mutton carcasses.

U. S. Choice is the highest grade ordinarily available in quantity for the retail trade. Choice carcasses resemble Prime carcasses but do not have so high a finish. The fat is white or creamy white and very firm. The lean is light pink; it is firm and velvety to the touch and well-marbled. A considerable number of lambs and a few yearlings are graded Choice.

Choice, as well as Prime, yearlings go into the high-priced restaurant trade. In fact, connoisseurs of meat prefer Choice yearling mutton to Choice lamb because of its better flavor.

U. S. Good lamb and yearling carcasses are somewhat lacking in

The U. S. Government grades some lamb and mutton carcasses, and inspects all that go into interstate commerce. The circular stamps are inspection stamps.

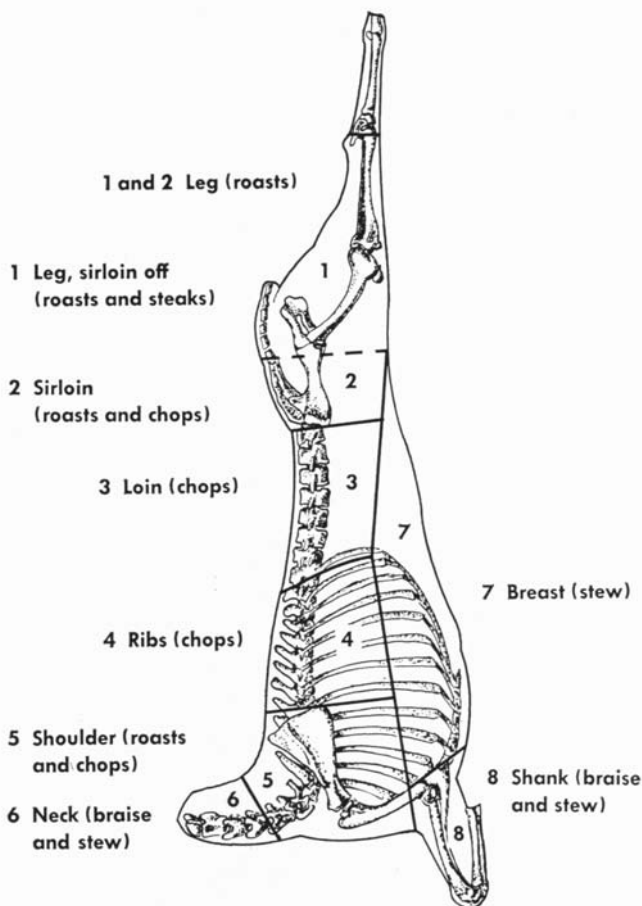
(Fig. 2)



conformation, quality, and finish, but have enough finish for flavor and tenderness. Many lamb carcasses are graded Good.

A few mature mutton carcasses are graded Good, but these are usually decidedly inferior to Good lambs in eating quality. A Good mutton carcass usually sells for less than half the price per pound of a Good lamb carcass.

U. S. Commercial lamb is not so rich in flavor nor so tender as the higher grades, but it does provide a large amount of fairly good lean at an economical price. The fat is usually thin and yellow; the lean is often dark and soft, with no marbling. Commercial mutton is an economical and nutritious meat, and that is about all that can be said in its favor.



Location of retail lamb and mutton cuts and their relation to the skeleton.
(Fig. 3)

U. S. Utility is the lowest grade sold in most markets. It is not recommended except from the standpoint of economy. The same is true of **U. S. Cull**.

Tho not all meat is Government-graded, all that goes into interstate commerce must be inspected by a graduate veterinarian employed by the Government to do this work. Each wholesale cut going from one state to another must bear a stamp certifying that the animal was free from disease and was slaughtered under sanitary conditions and that the carcass was wholesome for food when it left the packing plant.

Packer Grades

Since not all carcasses are Government-graded, packer grades are an additional help to consumers. Many packers, especially the larger ones, stamp their own brands upon the carcasses to indicate the grade. The names Premium, Star, Certified, and Puritan, for example, stand for high grades from different packers.

Many carcasses, especially those of lower grades from the big packers and those from local butchers bear no marks which indicate the grade. In buying ungraded or unbranded meat, a consumer must depend upon his own judgment or the judgment and integrity of the retailer.

Retail cuts of lamb:

Location, use, and how to cook

Location of the retail lamb cuts is shown in Fig. 3. On the following pages are suggestions for selecting and cooking the different cuts. Since lamb is usually tender, cooking with dry heat, such as broiling and roasting, may be used more extensively than with any other kind of meat. Lamb has a better flavor when broiled than when pan-broiled or fried. For a discussion of the basic principles of meat cookery, see Circular 585, "Beef for the Table."

Chops and Steaks

A chop is a small slice of meat which commonly is used as an individual serving. Chops get their name because usually the bone is chopped with a cleaver after the meat has been cut with a knife. They come from small carcasses such as lamb, mutton, veal, and pork.



Lamb loin chops of high grade often are the most expensive meat you can buy, but they are also the best of the lamb chops. One pound of loin chops serves three or four people. (Fig. 4)

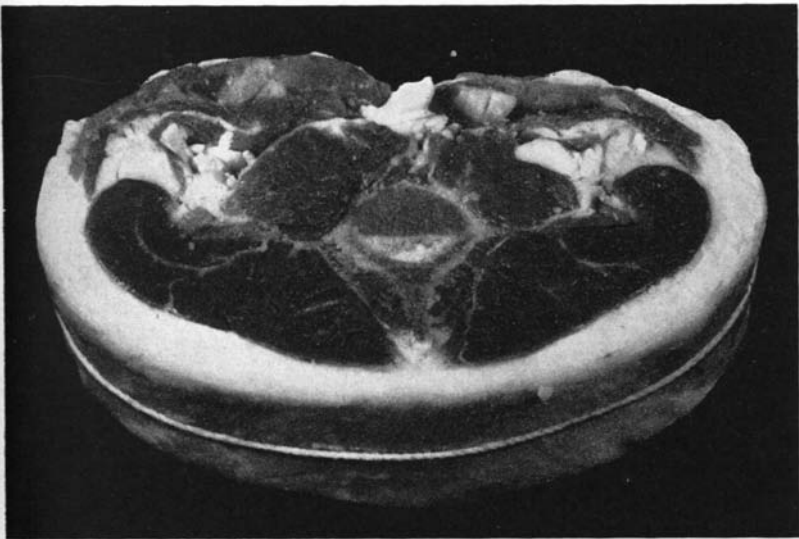
Steaks are larger slices of meat, usually providing several servings. They are from large carcasses, such as beef, and from the thicker parts of small carcasses, such as lamb legs. A knife and saw are used in cutting steaks from the carcass.

Loin chops (Fig. 4), which correspond to the porterhouse, T-bone, and club steaks of beef, are the best lamb chops. They are the most expensive of the lamb and mutton cuts. In fact, the best grades of lamb loin chops are usually the most expensive of any of the ordinary meat cuts. They are distinctly a luxury item.

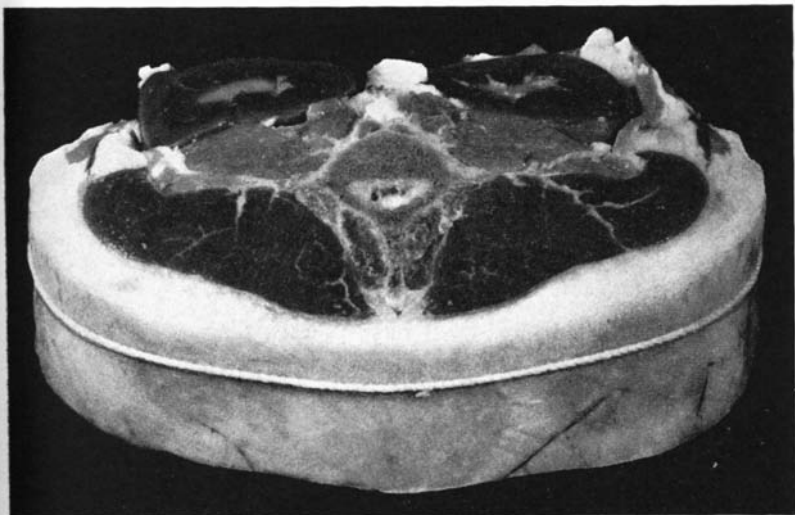
Loin chops from Prime, Choice, and Good carcasses should be cut at least an inch thick and broiled. Most people prefer broiled lamb chops well done or slightly toward the medium. The lower-grade loin chops should be fried. Each chop makes one serving, usually small.

English chops (Fig. 5) are recommended for those desiring larger servings than the single chops. An English chop is a double loin chop, unsplit thru the center of the backbone.

A kidney chop is a loin chop which contains a slice of kidney. Similarly, a part of the kidney may be included in an English chop. It is then called an English kidney chop (Fig. 6). It is a good plan to broil the kidneys separately from the chops and for a longer time



English chops (which are double loin chops) are used when a large serving is desired. There are about two of these chops to a pound. *(Fig. 5)*



English kidney chops contain slices of the kidney. A pound of these chops makes slightly less than two servings. *(Fig. 6)*



Rib chops rank next to loin chops in desirability and cost quite a bit less. They are usually smaller than loin chops, about five or six of these chops making a pound. (Fig. 7)

and then insert them in the chops before serving. Otherwise the kidney may not be cooked enough to suit most people.

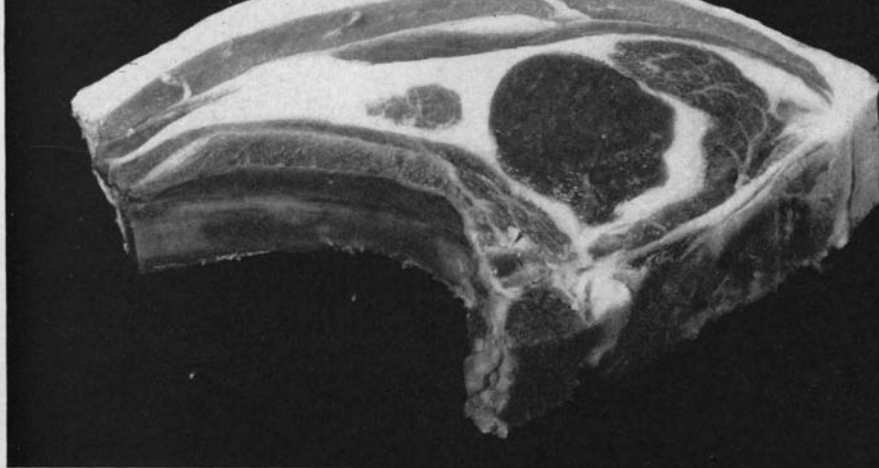
Rib chops (Fig. 7) correspond to pork rib chops. Altho they cost considerably less than loin chops, they are an excellent party meat, being especially popular for women's luncheons. A rib chop usually makes a smaller serving than a loin chop. The better grades should be cut thick and broiled.

Sometimes the meat is trimmed from the end of a rib chop to make a French chop (Fig. 8). A paper frill or chop holder is then slipped over the rib end before the chop is served.

Blade rib chops (Fig. 9), which come from the heavy end of the rib, are less desirable than the other rib chops.

French chops are often served for women's luncheons. The meat is trimmed from the end of a rib chop, and a chop holder is slipped over the rib end before serving. (Fig. 8)



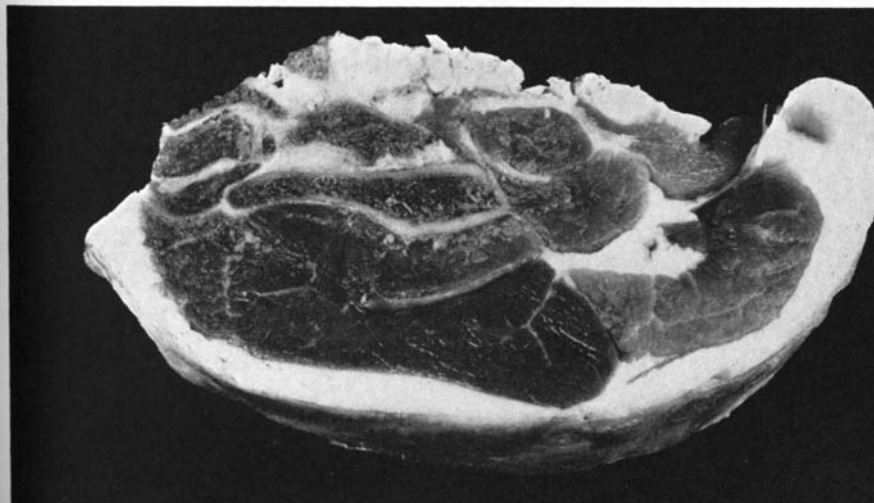


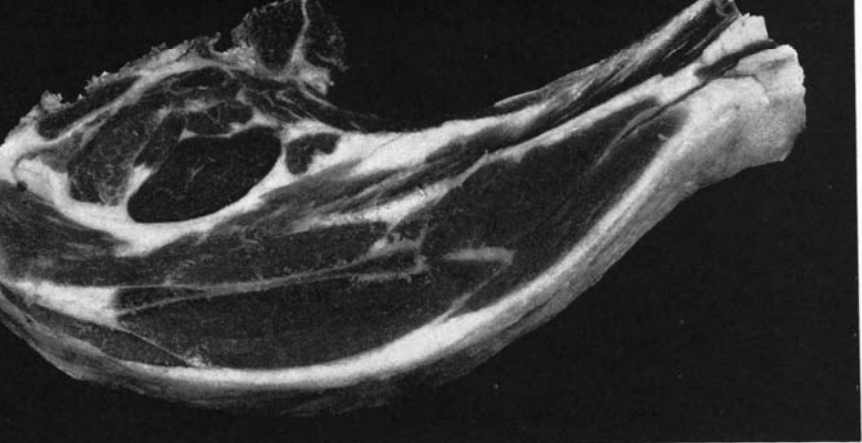
Blade rib chops are cut from the heavy end of the ribs and contain a large number of muscles and a section of the shoulder blade, which make them less desirable than other rib chops. (Fig. 9)

Sirloin chops (Fig. 10) are sometimes cut from heavy legs. They correspond to the sirloin steaks of beef. The better grades are of excellent quality and should be cut thick and broiled. One large chop will serve two people. When a leg is larger than is desired for a roast, the butcher will be glad to cut some sirloin chops from it.

Chuck rib or shoulder chops (Fig. 11) are cut from the rib face of the chuck or shoulder. They correspond to the chuck steaks of beef. They are not cut as thick as rib or loin chops, but the better

Sirloin chops are not ordinarily found on the market, but you can ask the butcher to cut them from the heavy end of a leg which is too large for a family. You can wrap them in wax paper, put them in the freezer, and then cook them later. (Fig. 10)





Chuck rib or shoulder chops are not a party meat, but they are economical. They are considerably cheaper than either rib or loin chops, and a pound makes three large servings. (Fig. 11)

grades may be broiled. Chuck rib chops of the lower grades should be braised.

These chops are not a satisfactory party dish, but their comparatively low price makes them a good meat for a family dinner. One chop usually makes one large serving.

Shoulder arm chops (Fig. 12) are cut from the arm side of the chuck. They correspond to the shoulder arm steaks of beef. Not only are they economical, but if they are cut from the better-grade carcasses, they are also quite tasty. What has been said about cooking chuck rib chops also applies to arm chops.

Lamb patties are made from ground lamb, usually breast and shank, molded into an individual serving, and wrapped with a slice of bacon (Fig. 13). Like the better chops and steaks, they are broiled.

Lamb steaks (Fig. 14) are sometimes, not often, sliced from the round portion of the leg. They correspond to beef round steaks.



Shoulder arm chops are a good buy. Containing less bone than chuck rib chops, they cost about the same. A pound makes about four servings.

(Fig. 12)

Lamb patties are not a party dish, but they are good to serve for a family meal. They are comparatively cheap, and there is no waste. A pound serves four or five people.

(Fig. 13)



The better grades are cut medium thick and broiled. They sell at about the same price as sirloin chops and are more economical, since they contain less bone.

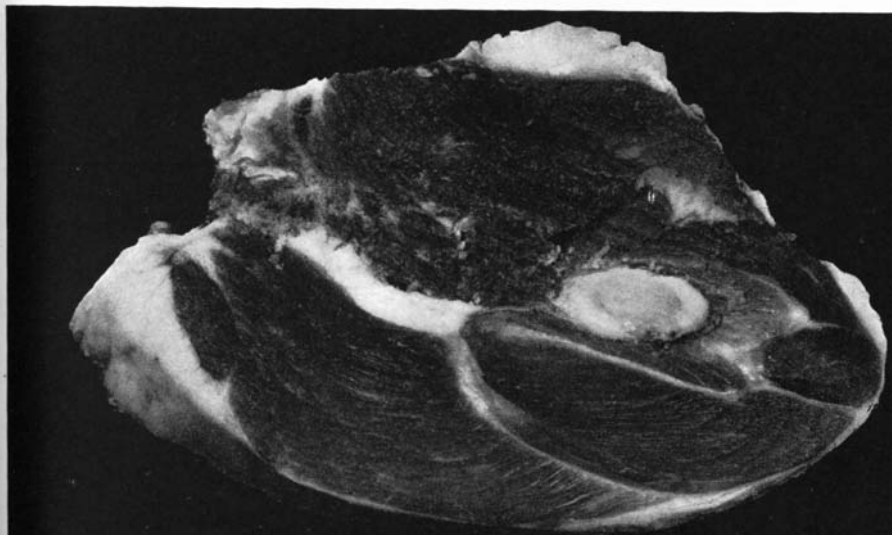
Roasts

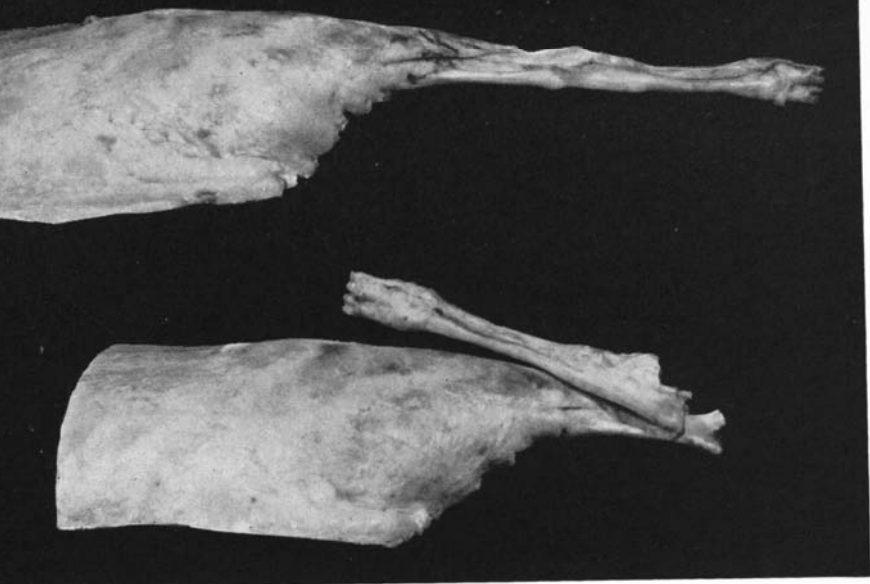
The leg is the lamb roast de luxe. It should be cut from carcasses of Commercial or better grade. Of course, the higher the grade, the better the roast. As a party meat, roast leg of lamb ranks with lamb loin and rib chops and with beef ribs, porterhouse steaks, and sirloin steaks, but it is usually cheaper. A leg serves about three people per pound.

The leg includes that part of the carcass which in beef is classified as sirloin, rump, and round. Sometimes the butcher includes

Lamb steaks are seldom cut in the market. They may be cut from the leg if it is still too large after sirloin chops have been cut off. One pound of lamb steak serves about four people.

(Fig. 14)



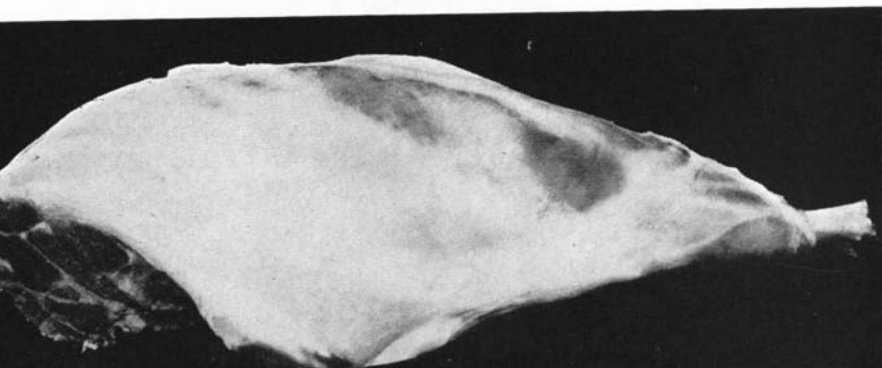


Some butchers weigh the lower hind shank with the leg, then cut it off. The shank bone above weighs 6 ounces, costs 20 cents, and is worth nothing. (Fig. 15)



An American leg of lamb may be roasted in a much smaller pan than a French leg. The use of a meat thermometer is recommended. (Fig. 16)

Leg of lamb, French style, requires a large roasting pan. Note the "break joint," which indicates that the meat is lamb, not mutton. (Fig. 17)



the lower hind shank as part of the leg (*Fig. 15*). This is not considered ethical, as there is no meat on this bone. A lamb leg should show a "break joint."

Legs are sold "American" and "French" style (*Figs. 16 and 17*). On American legs, the bone (tibia) at the small end of the leg is removed at the stifle joint and the meat from it is tucked into the thick portion of the cut. This makes a short, compact roast, and is desirable when the roasting pan is small.

For a French leg, the meat is trimmed from the end of the tibia and a paper frill placed over the bone before the roast is taken to the table. This makes a more attractive roast, but requires a long roasting pan.

For best results when roasting leg of lamb, use of a meat thermometer is recommended.

Since lamb leg is such a popular roast for company and since many people have difficulty carving it, some instructions prepared by the National Live Stock and Meat Board are given below.

First, see that the knife is very sharp before you start carving.

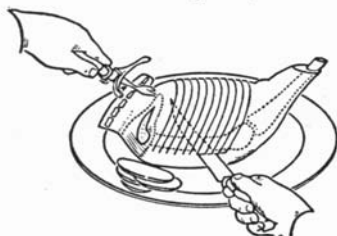
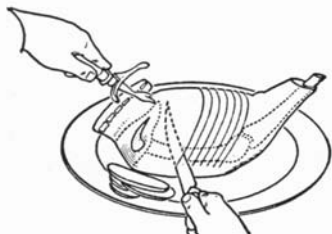
Place the leg of lamb so that the thick meaty section is on the far side of the platter. A right leg is shown in the illustrations. With the left leg, the shank bone is at the opposite end, or to carver's left, but the method of carving is the same.

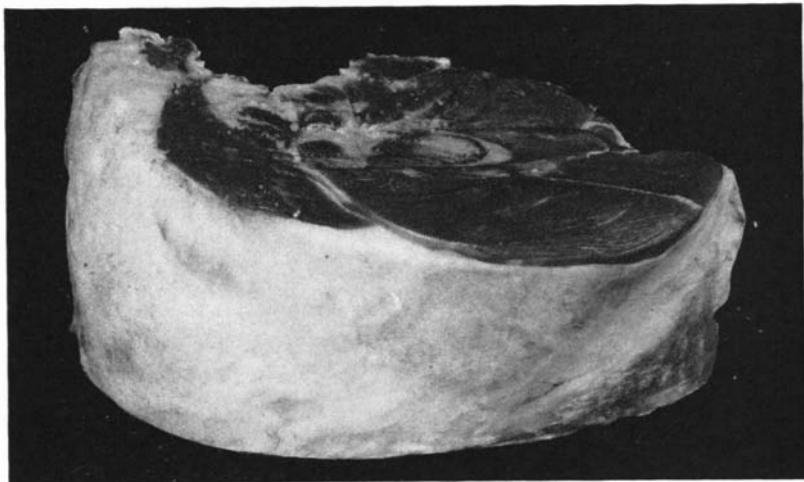
Insert the fork firmly in the large end and carve two or three lengthwise slices from the near thin side (*top picture*).

Turn the roast so it rests on surface just cut. The shank bone now points up from the platter.

Insert the fork in the left end of the roast. Starting at the shank end, slice down to the leg bone. Make parallel slices until aitch bone is reached (*center picture*). A desirable thickness is $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{8}$ inch.

With the fork still in place, run the knife along the leg bone, releasing all slices (*bottom picture*). (*Fig. 18*)





A sirloin roast may be cut from a large leg. Unless it has been boned and rolled, serve it for a family dinner, as it is harder to carve than the round part of the leg.

(Fig. 19)

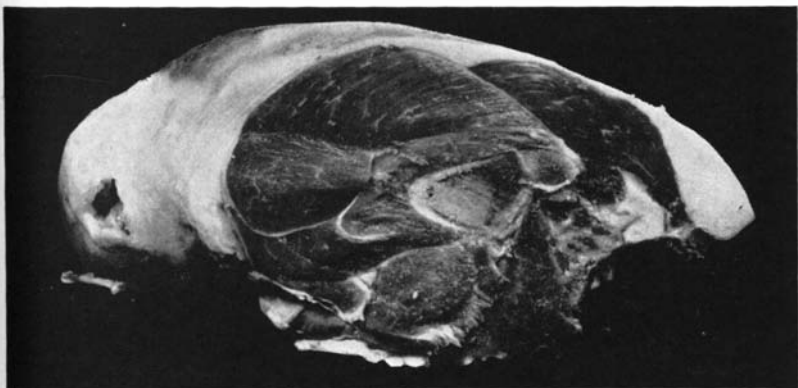


A boned and rolled sirloin roast is an excellent dish for a small party.

(Fig. 20)

Sirloin roasts (Fig. 19) are infrequently cut from large legs. While the better grades make excellent roasts, they are expensive and they are also hard to carve, as they contain much bone. They should be boned and rolled if used for a party dish (Fig. 20).

A round roast (Fig. 21) is left after the sirloin has been removed from the leg. This is a more desirable roast than the full leg, and is an excellent meat to serve for parties.

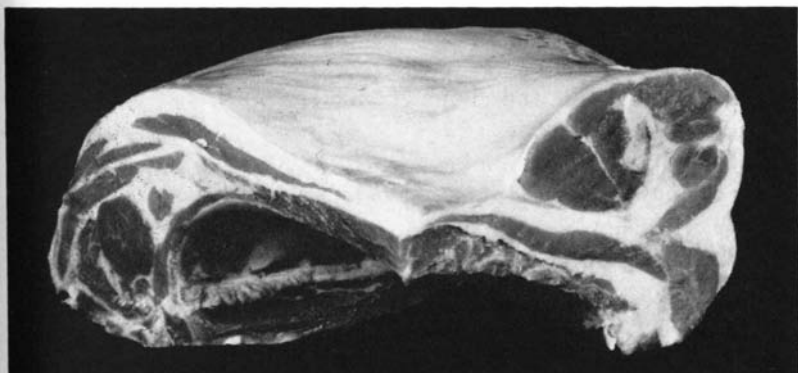


If the leg is too large, you can have the butcher cut off the sirloin for a roast (Fig. 19) and use the remainder for a round roast. A round roast is easily carved and makes an excellent party dish.

(Fig. 21)

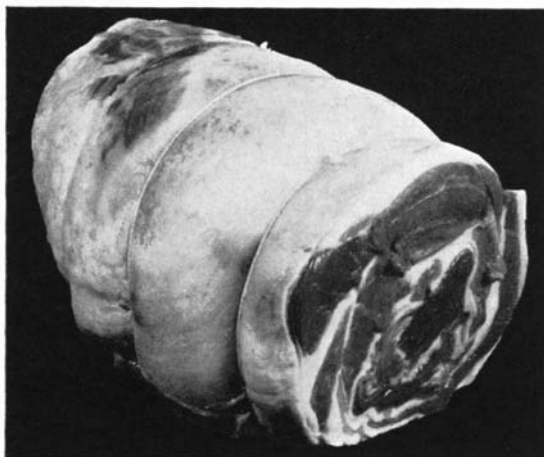
Lamb shoulder or chuck (Fig. 22) corresponds roughly to the wholesale beef chuck. Lamb shoulder of all grades from Commercial up makes a satisfactory roast. It is reasonably priced and serves about three people per pound (bone in).

The shoulder contains a heterogeneous collection of bones, which makes it very difficult to carve even in the family circle. It is therefore a good plan to have the butcher bone and roll the shoulder (Fig. 23) after you have bought it. Never buy a shoulder roast



A lamb shoulder is reasonable in price, but it has so much bone that it is very difficult to carve.

(Fig. 22)

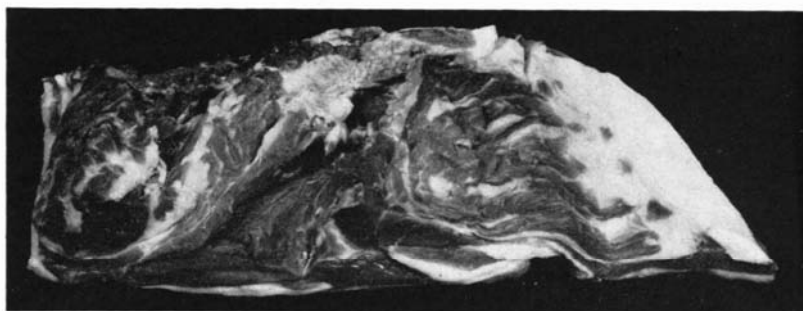


A boned and rolled shoulder is economical and easy to carve. The bones do not add to the flavor of a shoulder roast.

(Fig. 23)

Unless you trust your butcher, do not buy a rolled shoulder from his case. It may contain the shoulder, neck, and breast meat. Note large amount of breast on the right in the picture below.

(Fig. 24)



already rolled unless you have complete faith in your butcher, as the temptation is great to include the much cheaper shank, neck, and breast meat in the shoulder roll and then to sell it all at shoulder prices (Fig. 24).

Cushion shoulder is made by removing the bones in a way that will leave a pocket for stuffing. A cushion shoulder, of course, serves more than a shoulder or rolled shoulder. The National Live Stock and Meat Board (in "All About Lamb") recommends this stuffing:

Season boned shoulder inside and out with salt and pepper. Cook 1 cup celery and 1 tablespoon each of onion and parsley in 1 tablespoon of butter or margarine a few minutes. Add $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups bread crumbs, 1 teaspoon salt, and $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon each of marjoram, celery seed, and pepper. Add enough water or stock for a slightly moist stuffing. Fill boned shoulder loosely with stuffing and sew or skewer the opening.



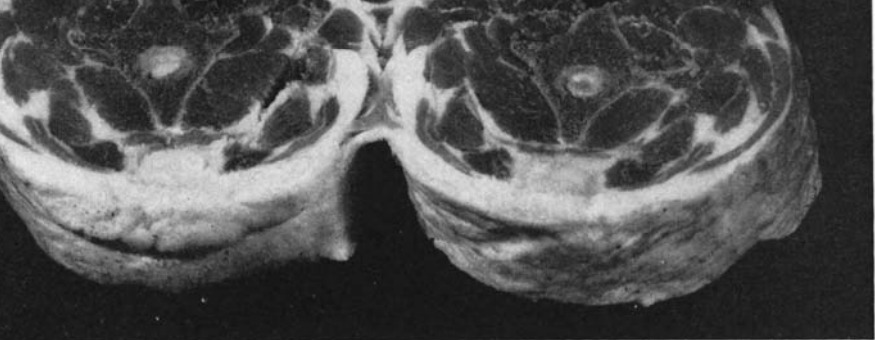
A crown roast is strictly a party dish. It is attractive, tender, full-flavored, and easy to carve, but it is expensive. The center may be filled with vegetables or with "lamburger." (*Fig. 25*)

Ribs and loins are sometimes used for roasts, but they are expensive and too thin for satisfactory roasts unless cut from large carcasses.

Crown roasts are sometimes made from the ribs. The meat is uniformly removed from the ends of the rib bones and a chop holder is put on each rib before serving (*Fig. 25*). Usually the cavity in the center of the roast is filled with peas or other vegetables before serving. The crown roast is attractive and easily carved but expensive. Many butchers do not know how to make it, and those who do know need quite a bit of time to prepare it.

Cuts for Braising and Stewing

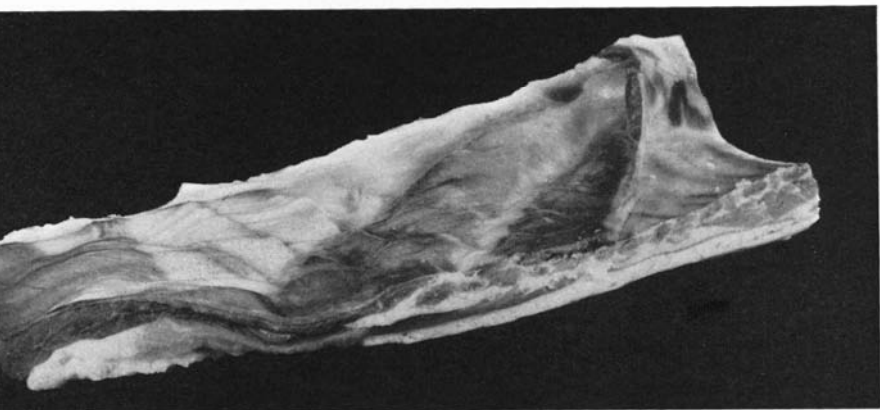
Legs, shoulders, and shoulder chops from Utility and Cull lambs should be braised (browned in a small amount of fat and cooked slowly with a little water in a covered utensil on top of the stove). Neck slices (*Fig. 26*), shanks (*Fig. 27*), and breasts (*Fig. 28*) of all grades are often cooked by this method. Breasts are sometimes opened up on top of the bones and stuffed with dressing; sometimes boned and rolled (*Fig. 29*).



Neck slices are often braised and served in a casserole dish. Altho they are cheap, they contain little meat. (Fig. 26)



Shanks are used extensively by economical meat buyers. They may be braised or stewed. (Fig. 27)



Lamb breasts are cheap, but they are not as good a buy as lamb shanks. (Fig. 28)

When boned and rolled, breasts are usually braised. (Fig. 29)





The cheaper cuts of lamb are used extensively for lamb stew and Scotch broth.

(Fig. 30)

Breasts, shanks, and neck slices are often cut into small pieces and used for lamb stew (Fig. 30). These cuts are usually cheap.

Variety Meats

The variety meats (sometimes called offal cuts) are liver, hearts, sweetbreads, brains, kidneys, and tongues. They are small in amount but very nutritious and usually quite economical.

Lamb liver is preferred to veal liver by some people, and usually costs less than half as much. It is fried, with or without bacon or onions. One pound serves four or five people.

Hearts are usually stuffed with dressing and braised. They are cheap in price, and 1 pound serves four people.

Sweetbreads are a delicacy. Usually they are simmered for 15 minutes, the outer membrane is removed, and then they are fried, creamed, or braised.

Brains are similar to sweetbreads in texture and are cooked in much the same way. Sometimes they are scrambled with eggs. They are very economical.

Tongues are another meat dish that will make the budget stretch farther. They are simmered in water until tender and then the skin is peeled off. The water in which tongues are cooked makes excellent broth or soup stock.

Lamb kidneys are considered a great delicacy by some people, particularly those of English extraction. Kidneys usually are broiled.

Retail cuts of yearling mutton and mutton

Yearling-mutton and mutton cuts are made and named the same as lamb cuts. Variety meats, except sweetbreads, are also the same.

Yearling mutton should be cooked the same as lamb of similar cut and grade. As already noted, the better cuts of yearling mutton are as good as lamb, or better, and they cost less. There is, however, very little high-grade yearling mutton on the market, and most of it goes to high-class restaurants.

Most mature mutton is of Commercial grade or lower. The cuts should be cooked in the same way as similar cuts of low-grade lamb. Variety meats should be braised.

Mutton usually sells at about half the price of lamb of similar grade and is a nutritious and economical meat. Some people prefer it to lamb, altho many consider it a lower-quality meat.

Lamb and mutton for the freezer

Lamb and mutton, when frozen for home use, will retain their fresh flavor for a year or even longer if properly handled.

To keep meat fresh as long as possible, cut, wrap, and freeze it as soon as it is thoroly chilled. Lamb and mutton, like other meats, should be tightly wrapped in high-grade locker paper, cellophane, aluminum foil, or other moisture-vapor-resistant material. If cellophane is used, the packages should be heat-sealed and over-wrapped with paper. For locker paper or aluminum foil, the "drug-store" wrap should be used. To do this, bring the two long edges of the paper together, fold them over, and continue folding until the paper is tight against the meat; then roll up each end until it is close against the package. (Your druggist can give you a demonstration.) Meat should be frozen at zero or lower and stored at zero.

Frozen meat does not have to be thawed before cooking. Of course it takes longer to cook frozen than unfrozen meat. If the meat is thawed before cooking, it is best to let it thaw slowly in the home refrigerator, as fewer of the meat juices will be lost this way than if it is thawed at room temperature.

For further directions, see U. S. Department of Agriculture Circular 709, "Freezing to Preserve Home-Grown Foods."